

Getting Back to the Basics?

I ran across this discussion on a listserve the other day. Good reading!—George

Anyone who's watched the Spencer Tracey/Gene Kelley version of "Inherit the Wind" will recognize as "Gimme Some Old Time Religion", but I had a slightly different version of it spilling out, which goes like this:

The Learnin' Hymn

Chorus

Gimme that ol' time learnin'
Gimme that ol' time learnin'
Gimme that ol' time learnin'
It's good enough for me

It's me it's me it's me oh John
Standin' in the need of learnin'
It's me it's me it's me oh John
Standin' in the need of learnin'

Repeat Chorus

Dem bones, dem bones dem dry bones
Dem bones, dem bones dem dry bones
Dem bones, dem bones dem dry bones

Now hear the Word of John *(a previous correspondent in this email listserve!)*

The head bone connected to the neck bone The neck bone connected to the shoulder bone The shoulder bone connected to the back bone Now hear the Word of John

Oh when the educators go marchin' in
Oh when the educators go marchin' in
Oh John! I want to be in that number
When the educators go marchin' in

Toe bone
Ankle bone
Shin bone
Knee bone
Thigh bone

Now hear the word of John

Get on board little chilun'
Get on board little chilun'
Get on board little chilun'
There's room for many a more
(repeat chorus)

Every time I feel the neurons
Synaptin' in my brain
I will learn
Every time I feel the neurons
Synaptin' in my brain
I will learn

Up on the mountain
John spoke
Out of his mouth came fire and smoke

All around me, it looks so fine
I asked John if all was mine
Every time I feel the neurons
Synaptin' in my brain
I will learn
Everytime I feel the neurons
Synaptin' in my brain
I will learn

(Repeat chorus twice)

That old time learning --- John Hibbs takes us back to those halcyon days when educators did it right and we all learned. Whoooooa . hold on, ain't those people out there being booted from their jobs because of globalization mostly beneficiaries of some of that ol' time learnin'? Heck, what's their problem, can't find any jobs out there? They were taught right, weren't they?

I believe that John's grasp of the quotidian realities of the modern day high school is back there with William Jennings Bryan and company. It'd be great to get back to the three R's, but they aren't giving kids the skills to deal with the world today anymore than they did when John formed his overly fond memories of them. John did well, and most of the folks on this listserv did and will because we've the skills to adapt, we learned in spite of any intrinsic failures of the system and we, by and large on our own, figured out the value of lifelong learning and how it would be necessary to be flexible in the world unfolding in front of us. Far too many never got those lessons, and they're the ones without jobs as steel and clothes mills close, and so much else moves overseas, and they're stuck trying to figure out how to get back into some form of employment.

The reality is that anywhere from 25 to 50% of today's high school graduates will lose a job to globalization. What skills are we helping those kids to obtain that will make it so they can transition easily enough onto something else, or to better facilitate their re-training? We don't address this at the secondary level and we sure and heck don't at the post-secondary level, but we should, we must, for otherwise what are we left with? This isn't just a matter of getting back to the basics, as John would seem to suggest, it's more than that; it involves a different skill set and perspective to the future that we haven't had to have in the past and we need to figure out where we should be putting our energies as we work to best prepare our children for a tumultuous future.

As for the extra funding and children being more important than F-16's --- well, of course, and maybe that, along with a national policy that makes some sense and is adequately funded, will one day come to pass. Ruminating on that or bemoaning it isn't fixing the need now.

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